

INTL. FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies was founded in 1919 – as the League of the Red Cross, a name inspired by the League of Nations – in order to bring together individual Red Cross Societies into an international structure capable of organizing large-scale relief operations. The Federation’s Secretary General is Markku Niskala of Finland.

Much of the Federation’s work is concerned with mobilizing global response in times of disaster. When a country is ravaged by a hurricane, earthquake, flood, epidemic, or major population movement, the local Red Cross/Red Crescent society can appeal to the Federation for help. The Federation sends relief supplies from its strategically located emergency warehouses, calls on other member-societies to send help, launches international funding appeals, and coordinates overall relief efforts. It also cares for refugees outside areas of conflict.

NATIONAL SOCIETIES

The Federation includes 179 member National Societies, including the American Red Cross (ARC). National Societies act as auxiliaries to the public authorities of their own countries in the humanitarian field and provide a range of services including disaster relief, health and social programmes, and assistance to people affected by war.

Together, the National Societies have 97 million members and volunteers, and 300,000 employees, assisting some 233 million beneficiaries each year. Many of these national societies, including the ARC, are long established, can draw from significant private funding sources, and have long performed humanitarian activities around the globe. Other National Societies are new, not well funded, and conduct operations only in their own countries. The Federation Secretariat based in Geneva assists these newer National Societies in assuming a broader role.

The Federation works closely with private nongovernmental groups and international organizations like the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). The Federation also helps train national societies in first aid, nursing, and early warning detection systems designed to avert the worst effects of natural disasters. It helps in the fight against AIDS by providing information and educational materials, particularly in developing countries, and by overseeing the safety of Red Cross/Crescent blood supplies.



Nicaraguan Red Cross Society (NRCS) worker administers a vaccine donated by the American Red Cross.

Programs to combat drug abuse, especially among young people, have been a Federation concern for over a decade.

The Federation has conducted research into the laws regarding international disaster response (sometimes referred to as International Disaster Response laws or IDRL), in an effort to remove logistical impediments to access in emergency situations. Another major focus of Federation research recently has been to assess the effect of discrimination against those living with HIV/AIDS on vulnerable populations.

THE EMBLEM

Currently, only two emblems are recognized within the Movement, either a red cross or red crescent on white background. Several national societies, including Israel's Magen David Adom ("Red Shield of David," or MDA) society, have been unable to join the Federation because they are unable to use one of the two approved symbols due to their perceived religious connotations. Efforts to adopt a new, universally acceptable third emblem for the movement are at least a quarter-century old. In 2000, the American Red Cross national chapter began withholding its annual dues from the Federation pending MDA's inclusion. (For additional history of the emblem issue, see chapter on ICRC). Many observers feel that the Federation will not be able to claim universality until it resolves the outstanding issue of the emblem.

BUDGET

The Federation's funding appeal for 2003 amounted to more than 220 million Swiss francs (approximately 160 million U.S. dollars). In addition to the global appeal, separate emergency appeals are launched throughout the year as new disasters occur.



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